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The University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

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Sept. 6, 1996

UM READIES NEW PHARMACY DEGREE PROGRAM

MISSOULA --

Starting fall semester 1997, University of Montana pharmacy students may choose to study an extra year and earn a Doctor of Pharmacy degree.

The state Board of Regents approved the six-year degree at its May meeting in Havre.

The new degree will not supplant the five-year Bachelor of Science the school already offers. Pharmacy school Dean David Forbes said the school will continue to offer the bachelor's degree for students who choose the shorter route to a professional degree and into the work force.

"I believe in letting students make the choice, so we decided to go with both degrees," he said.

Pharmacy students won't have to make that choice until they've taken two years of pre-pharmacy and two years of regular pharmacy courses, Forbes said. At that point, they must choose either the five-year or six-year track. They may make the choice earlier if they wish.

Six-year students will take an additional semester of course work comprising four new courses not taught in the five-year program, said Gayle Cochran, chair of the pharmacy practice department. They'll also spend an additional semester in clerkship, getting practical experience off campus, she said.

The doctor's degree will also be available through distance-learning technologies such as e-mail and videoconferencing to practicing Montana pharmacists with the bachelor's degree. Tom

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Pelletier, director for off-campus graduate programs at UM's Center for Continuing Education, said he is working with the pharmacy school to unveil the external program in fall 1997.

Nationwide, Forbes said, the push is toward six- and even seven-year degrees. But graduates with a bachelor's degree are still in demand, he said, which is another reason why the school chose to retain the five-year program. Other regional schools such as Idaho State, North Dakota State and South Dakota State universities are offering only the six-year program. Keeping the five-year program puts UM's pharmacy school in a "pretty good spot," he said.

"Big companies such as Osco hire 65 percent of the U.S. output of pharmacists," he said. "And what they want are students with the five-year degree."

Having the doctor's degree won't improve graduates' job opportunities appreciably in Montana, Cochran said, but "outside Montana, hospitals and other organized health-care settings are hiring Pharm.D. graduates preferentially at higher salaries."

Not to be confused with the Doctor of Pharmacy degree, which is a professional degree, is UM's doctorate in pharmaceutical sciences. Launched in January 1996, the doctorate is a research degree intended to address a national need for scientists in drug discovery and related research.

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